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Study Finds Misinformation and Deception on Websites of Anti-Abortion “Crisis Pregnancy Centres” in Canada

NATIONAL — Anti-abortion counselling agencies in Canada often present misinformation on their websites or fail to disclose their anti-choice or religious agenda to prospective clients, according to a new study published today by the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada.

Crisis Pregnancy Centres (CPCs) are anti-choice agencies that present themselves as unbiased medical clinics or counselling centres, and which often claim to provide women with non-judgemental information on all their options when faced with an unintended pregnancy. However, CPCs are not medical facilities, most are Christian ministries, they generally will not refer clients for abortion or contraception, and many promote misinformation about abortion. CPCs in Canada have no regulatory oversight; however, 68% of them are registered charities.

The study identified 180 CPCs across Canada. Of those, 166 had websites. The findings revealed that a large majority of the websites do one or both of the following: spread misleading or inaccurate information about abortion, contraception, sexually-transmitted infections, sexual activity, or adoption — or present themselves deceptively, such as by not disclosing that they won't refer for abortion, or hiding their religious stance from prospective clients.

The study report, *Review of “Crisis Pregnancy Centre” Websites In Canada*, can be viewed at this link: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/CPC-study/CPC-Website-Study-ARCC-2016.pdf>

A sampling of findings from the study:

- 48% of the CPCs listed negative psychological consequences of abortion on their websites, primarily in the context of “Post-abortion Syndrome”, which is not medically recognized.
- 5% of websites claimed a link between abortion and breast cancer, which has been scientifically rejected; while 9% of websites cited other medical risks of abortion that were exaggerated or not scientifically proven.
- 24% of websites promoted sexual abstinence as the ideal solution for unmarried women.
- 60% of the centres failed to disclose on their websites that they don't refer for abortion or contraception.
- 96% of the centres revealed a religious affiliation or agenda on their websites, but only 24% were upfront about it. Often, religious references were sparse or hidden on Donation pages.

- At least 35% offered a sex education program to youth or local schools and communities – including to public schools in many cases.

“Our study shows the need for more transparency and professionalism by CPCs in Canada,” said Joyce Arthur, lead author of the study report. “These centres present themselves as safe places for women to get unbiased support and advice on an unintended pregnancy, but they often provide medical misinformation related to abortion, which can be upsetting or pose a health risk to those using the centres.”

Co-author Kathy Dawson hopes that the study will lead to more public awareness and scrutiny of the centres. “It was shocking to discover how many CPCs were infiltrating public schools with sex education programs, some of which teach conservative ideology and misinformation on sexual practices and health.” Dawson also noted that over a quarter of the websites promoted adoption. “They were overemphasizing adoption at the expense of other options, but rarely mentioned any of the negative effects that adoption usually has on women who give up their babies, such as lifelong trauma.”

Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson, another co-author, said that regulation of the anti-abortion centres would be desirable to ensure that women are not misled or harmed when they go there, particularly women seeking abortion care. “Perhaps the centres should be required to post notices on their websites and premises to inform clients about the services they do and don’t offer. Also, any centres that aren’t upfront about their agenda and services should be removed from referral lists used by health professionals and social service agencies. We also recommend that such CPCs be denied public funding and have their charitable tax status revoked.”

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